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ABSTRACT

A brief review of systems theory provides a rationale for an underlying theoretical model within which systems theory can be more completely understood. The essence of the model is that persons are the major unit of study because the available means of satisfying "basic needs" define and shape interaction patterns in the family as in other human subsets. The basis for the need systems derives from existential theory/philosophy and utilizes a substantial part of Erich Fromm's formulations. The ecological model of family therapy studies all interacting forces that influence a family such as interpersonal, intrapersonal, cultural, political, and economical. The major therapeutic technique is to develop awareness of the forces interacting in a family and assist the family to make changes through a sequential process of (1) understanding, (2) exploration of alternatives, (3) implementation of changes, (4) stabilization, and (5) establishment of support systems. (Author)

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BEYOND THE SYSTEMS APPROACH TO FAMILY THERAPY, AN ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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PART I

INTRODUCTION

A system is an organized method of attaining a goal. The computer is a classic demonstration of system methodology. Not only is it programmed to attain specific goals, but those goals can be changed simply by the substitution of one instruction for another. If the system breaks down a new piece can be readily inserted to take over the function of the misbehaving piece.

If only family systems were so simple. We know why we create the computer because the goals we set for it are relatively simple and are usually obvious. The function of the family system is not so obvious. Where large families used to be an economic asset, they are now a liability. Where the family used to be a self-sufficient economic unit working for a common goal, such is often not now the case. The family used to be the old age security of the parents, this is now largely a government function. There are many who are saying that, because of social and economic changes, the family as a system may be obsolete. It is our belief that there are reasons for maintaining the family as a viable system and that these reasons can be stated with sufficient clarity to guide us in helping families to function more effectively.

We are assuming the family to be one of many institutional structures that are subsumed by the term culture and is seen as one of the means the culture uses to see that its goals are met.

Whether one wishes to start from Adam and Eve or take a more evolutionary model of human beginnings, it is apparent that the human system is a social system and one that is built on dynamic forces. These dynamic forces appear to be essentially the outcome of coping behaviors as a "thinking" organism

seeks to find some reproachment with the world in which it lives.

It seems clear that although the "wherefrom" and the "whereto" of man remain veiled, the fact of the "thrownness," the "there" is indisputable. Man is left in the "there" in a condition which leaves him to his own devices and responsibilities. While man is within nature he is not predetermined, enslaved or coerced by that nature, to make only those decisions which are compatible with nature. There is a dynamic part of man which though encompassed by nature is not subservient to nature. In non-human things potentiality means only what is not yet real, or for that matter, what is not really necessary (at least not as an identity function). For man, on the other hand, potentiality is the most genuine and final characterization, for by his own awareness of self, he unveils to himself his own potentialities. It is in the light of understanding ones potentialities that man sees the "things" of the world and is able to use them in a creative manner. It is for man to actualize (use creatively) the potential of the "things" of the world, but on the human side he is his own project, he must both assess the capabilities of the material and utilize them to the fullest. For man to actualize his potential is to complete himself.

NEEDS

In coping with this "natural" environment, some essential and species wide dilemmas are presented. It is these existential dilemmas that lead to what we call basic needs. A need is basic if it is essential to life or sanity and if its satiation is beneficial to the organism. Being beneficial does not also mean that the need satiation selected is the most optimal possible one that

could be made.

The basic needs are those forces which motivate man toward complete realization of his own powers. These needs are basic needs in that they are common to all mankind. They are needs because the lack of suitable satisfyers cause the organism to disintegrate, become restricted in the responses it can make (become more animalistic and less human). Satisfactory satiation of these needs is a must for the healthful survival of the organism. It is in this sense that they are needs and not wants. Man's wants could indeed be a destructive force in his efforts to find the life good to live. Needs are intrinsic in the organism environment interaction but means of satisfaction may be determined by the cultural forces among which man lives.

An additional factor causing this is that man more readily recognizes the magnitude of his freedom once free of the physiological needs. Thus free, he realizes, because he is now more free to experience himself, that there are many avenues of satiation of these higher needs. Higher need satisfaction not only requires more from the individual involved but also involves more people, a wider view of the environment, and more partial goals. More ends-means decisions are required and it becomes more difficult to maintain in a consistent frame of orientation the part-whole relationship. While the lower needs are more egocentric, i.e. hunger, the higher needs are more social and outwardly directed, i.e., love.

Values and needs are intimately related in that values are societally approved satisfyers of basic needs. Again we will find ourselves in the means-ends trap, for that which leads to a value may become valued in its own right

and be misinterpreted to be a value per se.

Erich Fromm has postulated five basic needs as follows:

1. A need to relate to others. These relations, if satisfied in a positive manner, will result in a loving kind of relationship in which one feels a sense of responsibility and concern for others and self, or it can be manifested in terms of submission to others or dominance over others. Either of these latter being of a vertical nature and not of the horizontal nature more proper to present being.
2. A need for a sense of personal identity. In this he expresses the need of a person to experience his own powers. To become a rational being who does not conform from either fear or ignorance but because the external forces to which he conforms are under his power and are determined by him. He does not become a slave of his own creation but sees himself as one who is able.
3. A need for a feeling of rootedness. This is to be interpreted as a feeling of mutuality with all mankind. This need satisfied in a negative sense leads to exclusive and excluding ties to others.
4. A need for a system of orientation and devotion. In this he calls for the use of reason, not just intelligence, for this can, in fact enslave, in determining behavior. The reverse of this we see every day in the vast mass of people who live a purposeless life. People who act as they do because this is the way they are suppose to act, never questioning the irrationality of their actions.
5. A need to transcend the creature state. This has been approached

from many sides through the years and probably so because it has such relevance for living. If satisfied along more positive lines the satisfaction of this need leads to creativeness and a life dully lived. The thwarting of this need on the other hand leads to destructiveness, and the destroying of both self and others.

While basic needs are universal the allowable means for their satiation are not.

CULTURAL DETERMINANTS OF NEEDS

Culture is the stablized and permitted methodology for need satiation. Some have posited, for this reason, that culture is the source of personal disintegration and, by corollary, should be the means to positive mental health. This essentially manipulative methodology has been tried on occasion but has not met with unequivocable success. In the field of family therapy this appears to be the prototype of the communication models. In fact, it is the essence of systems theory. It is also the point of departure for the model we are presenting today. It does not attend to the dynamic genesis of the systems themselves. A major problem of systems approaches has been the lack of an underlying dynamic that both energizes the system and gives it direction. We feel that a basic need hypothesis does that. In order to understand the system, one must have knowledge of what it is trying to do. A highly efficient system that has no direction could produce calamitous outcomes. In simple cultures the means by which needs are met is fairly clear and unforgiving. In larger and more complex cultures, these means are not only not clearly specified but

alternatives are available, if not particularly accepted. Basic needs may be met in ways that promote positive mental health or in ways that do not. In either case, the basic need is met and life or sanity preserved. However, we are assuming that positive mental health is more than just the lack of insanity. Some means will prevent insanity but still produce difficult conditions in the culture or family. The basic needs and the means of positive and negative means of meeting them or given below:

Negative	Basic Needs	Positive
Dominance/submission	To relate to others	Equality
Conformity/alienation	Sense of personal identity	Experience own powers
Exclusive and excluding ties	Sense of rootedness	Ties to the culture
Irrationality	System of orientation and devotion	Reason
Destroy	Transcend the creature state	Create

Human behaviors are not infinite. There are enormous differences in the combinations of behaviors, but basically the available behavioral realm is limited. We are proceding on the assumption that all behavior is a derivative of basic need pressure. The needs remain the same but the available means of satiation are determined by the social context in which the individual is embedded. This social context is not the same for all family members.

The need for relatedness can essentially be met either by vertical means (i.e., top dog: under dog) or by horizontal means (i.e., equality). Some, particularly Jay Haley, would take the position that all relationships are power relationships (i.e., vertical). We are taking the position that this is

largely true because of the economic and social system this culture embraces. However, we feel that it is possible and desirable to seek as near equality in relationship as the conditions allow. The children in a family are not likely to hold as much power as the parents, however, if they do not share in some of the power they will not learn to use power in personal relationships and will remain at this child level.

Power in relationships and personal identity are inextricably linked. Personal identity requires that one take risks in order to ascertain what can and what can not be done. Unless one builds a solid participatory identity, one must resort to definition by how others respond to you. These responses are clouded by the identity material of the responder and are thus loaded away from positive support for the person seeking personal identity. This paradox will always be present in human relations to a greater or lessor extent.

The need for security is often met by becoming embedded in exclusive and excluding groups. As one seeks to establish an interdependent identity one also needs to have a broadly based system of security.

This vacillation between dependence and interdependence (security vs risk) may be the most pervasive problem in family therapy. It permeates most facets of the male-female relationship: the child-parent relationship: and the child-child relationship. The unit selected for the satiation of this need is most significant. This unit is not always contained in the family proper.

THE FAMILY'S PLACE IN NEED SATIATION

The culture is the agreed upon design for meeting basic needs. However,

since need satiation is such a complex enterprise, additional structures are established in order to further control the form need satiations take. These structures are called institutions. The family is an institution that is established to facilitate the meeting of some basic needs. It appears that the family is the primary source of need satiation for relating and identity needs, and to some extent, for security needs.

PART II

AN ECOLOGICAL MODEL OF COUNSELING FAMILIES

The term ecology can be defined as the study of the relationship between organisms and their environment. It carries with it the connotation that living things are interrelated and interdependent in complex ways. An example of ecology in nature is to study how an oak tree grows in differing environments. The small seedling is dependent upon the soil, sun, weather, relationship to other trees etc. It may not grow to become a mighty oak.

In relating the concept to families the model is concerned about the interrelationships between the family system and other systems which can determine their interdependency. This model observes the totality of forces that operate within and upon a particular individual and the family as a whole. This model goes beyond the systems theory of family counseling. As system is usually defined as the sum total of parts working independently and together to achieve required results or outcomes. As it is applied to a family, a systems approach means that family members will work independently and together to achieve a variety of goals.

Family system dynamics are usually greater than the individual dynamics. According to R.D. Laing, family system dynamics are built on systems that each spouse has introjected from his/her own family. The family is the source of all concepts that an individual possesses. Individuals are the product of an almost infinite number of reflections and refractions of others' views.

Systems theory is often concerned with those matters that have to do

with the immediate interacting family. The emphasis is usually placed on the communication patterns and roles that each member plays and reacts to.

The ecological model studies all the interacting forces that influences a family; such as, interpersonal, intrapersonal, cultural, political, economical, etc. The forces within the individual include: needs, motivation, attitudes, values, fears, anxieties, self-esteem, concerns, pressures, blocks, and frustrations. Those forces acting on the family include culture, religion, peer group, politics, economy, education, work, leisure time, etc. Every culture is set up to meet the needs of those who comprise its membership. Since most cultures are too complex to operate with only one system for defining and enforcing the rules, there is created a system of structures to do this rule making and enforcing function, we call these structures institutions. One such institutional structure is the family. No institution operates independently of the other.

Changes in any one element of an ecological system usually affect all other elements in complex, indeterminate ways. When the family is in distress, there is something going on somewhere. An example: one of the spouses does not have their needs met in the marital relation. (It may be because they did not ask or the other was unwilling or unable to meet the need). In any case, the need remains operative and will be met--sometimes in extra-marital affairs, sometimes in work, and sometimes by other family members. Forces operating outside the family such as natural forces can affect the family.

PRINCIPLES OF THE ECOLOGY MODEL

1. There are no independent variables in human behavioral systems.

2. Human behavioral systems have everchanging limits and attempts at delineating an area only changes the limits somewhere else.

3. The only stable state for a human system is change.

4. Homeostasis is the attempt by a system seeking to maintain itself in a steady state.

FUNCTIONS AND GOALS OF THE FAMILY

There are essential functions and goals of the family that are fundamental requirements for growth and stability. A therapist or counselor must pay attention to the basic factors and help the family deal more adequately with its basic needs. The functions and goals are as follows:

1. To provide for basic survival needs such as food, shelter, sleep, etc. and to be met effectively.

2. To develop a working marital coalition that is capable of dealing with stages of family development.

3. To rear the offspring by providing an environment which is conducive to and effective in meeting the physical and emotional growth needs.

4. To provide for individuation of each family member.

5. To clarify perceptions and have clear communications.

6. To clarify role reciprocity.

7. To clarify generational boundaries

8. To provide a basic structure that is stable, flexible and provides for mutality and support.

9. To teach each member to act appropriately in the system, not just react.

10. To create a new way of living that is fluid and dynamic.

11. To take responsibility for growth and change.

12. To create an awareness of forces and dynamics influencing the family system.

PART III

INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

It is essential to first have adequate data on which to proceed. This data should include:

1. Family History - This should include not only the immediate family but also the family of origin of the husband and wife.
2. Individual histories - not only factual material, but attitudinal, value, general personality characteristics and whatever else can be obtained. Unless this is attended to, it is likely that whatever family change is instituted will be sabotized and the homeostatic process invoked in order to assure personal comfort.
3. An assessment to the family dynamics, in pairs, whatever systems are obviously operative (i.e., parent-child against rest of family) and the general modes of relating and communicating.
4. What need systems seem to be building pressure? This should give some insight into the ability of the family unit to set the conditions conducive to productive need satiation.
5. Assess the degree to which the family expectations are realistic, particularly in light of prior information concerning its members.

If the information gathering phase produces expectations that family therapy might be productive.

THE THERAPEUTIC PROCESS

The theraputic process must move through a sequential order. This order

has five phases as listed below:

PHASE I: TO GAIN UNDERSTANDING

1. Gather information by instrumentation, interview methods, etc.
2. Make a diagnosis
3. Set goals

PHASE II: TO EXPLORE ALTERNATIVES

1. Alternatives for change
2. Tentative decision making
3. Explore tentative decisions

PHASE III: TO IMPLEMENT CHANGES

1. Commitment to goal decision
2. Renegotiation of contracts
3. Clear communication
4. Clear generational boundaries
5. Creating a new homeostatic base

PHASE IV: STABILIZATION

1. Assessing and surmounting barriers
2. Stabilizing change
3. Establishing interpendence

PHASE V: TERMINATION

1. Summarization
2. Establishing support systems
3. Closure

SUMMARY

The concept of marriage and the institution we call the family is in a state of change. There are many cultural, personal and intrafamily dynamics that prevent building effective supporting structures for families. Using an ecological approach to therapy is one model of affecting change within the family system. An ecological perspective looks at all the forces interacting with one another that affect family members and the family system. A major theraputic skill is to develop awareness of the forces interacting in that family and assist the family to make changes.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY COUNSELING

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